Avista Utilities Rebuild of 12.6-miles of the Benton-Othello Switching Station 115 kV Electrical Transmission Line on the Hanford Site, WA (Proposed Project)

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is seeking input for a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Environmental Assessment (EA) to assess the potential environmental effects of the Avista Utilities (Avista) Rebuild of 12.6-miles of the Benton-Othello Switching Station (Benton-Othello) 115 kV Electrical Transmission Line Project on Avista's right-of-way (ROW) through the Hanford Site, including the Hanford Reach National Monument (Monument).

Proposal

Avista's Benton-Othello 115 kV transmission line has been delivering power to the Hanford and Othello areas for over 90 years. When the line was originally built with Western Red Cedar poles, it had an expected life of about 60 years. Now that portions of the line are 70 to 90 years old, Avista is proposing to complete an upgrade of the transmission line by rebuilding the remaining 12.6 miles (20.3 kilometers) of transmission line beginning at 0.5 miles (0.8 kilometers) south of State Route 24, on the Hanford Site. The northern 10.6 miles (17.1 kilometers) of the transmission line goes through the Monument, which is managed jointly by DOE and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). See **Figure 1. Vicinity Map**.

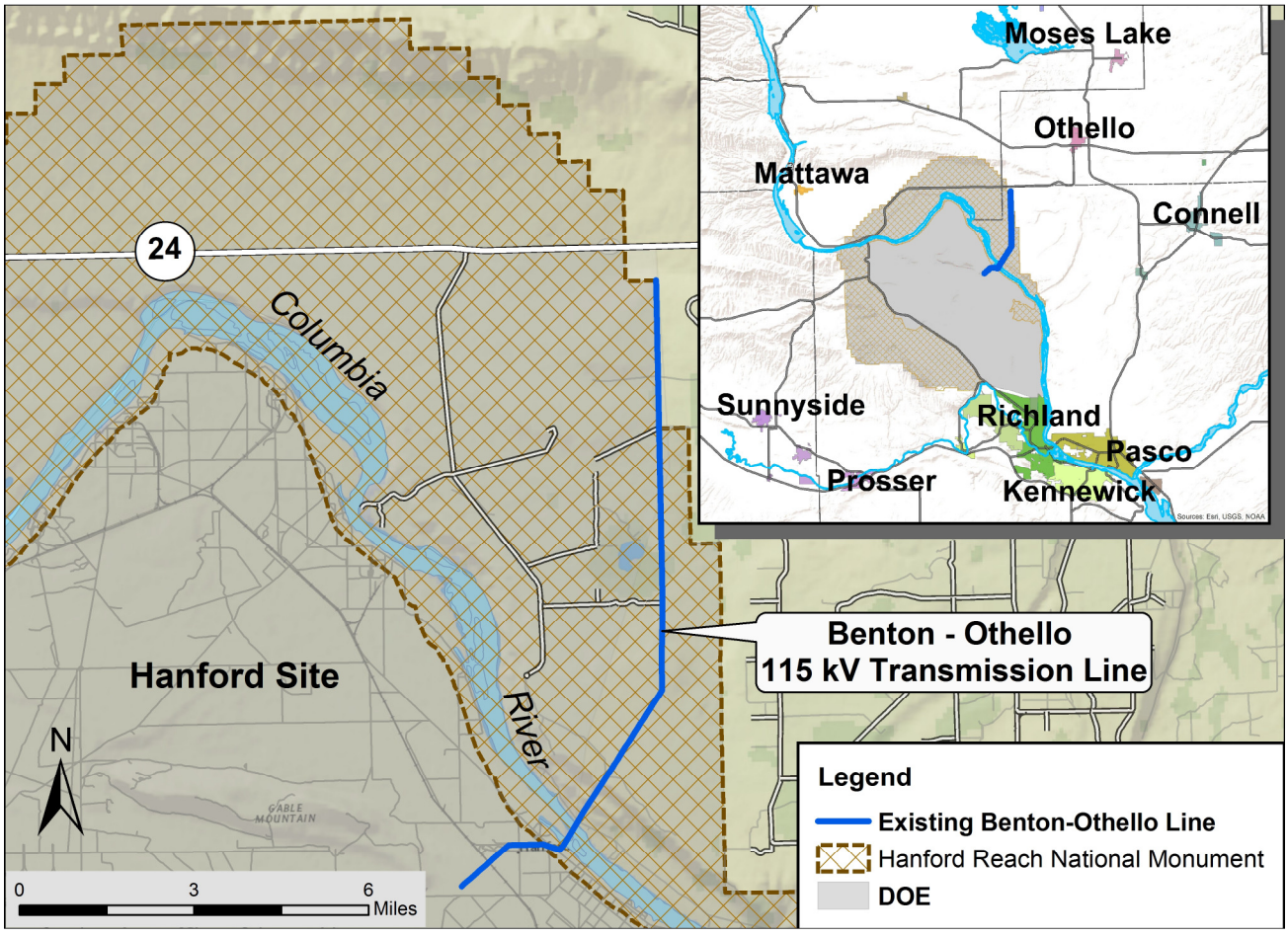

Figure 1. Vicinity Map

For more information on this proposed action, visit:
http://www.hanford.gov/page.cfm/EnvironmentalAssessments
To join the project mailing list send a request to: avistatranlineea@rl.gov
or contact Randall Krekel at 509-376-4264

The proposed project would involve the following:

- Replacing existing wood structures with self-weathering steel structures. See **Figure 2. Existing Structures** and **Figure 3. Example of Proposed Structures**.
- Upgrading existing wire to improve reliability and efficiency and to meet growing energy needs.
- Rebuilding within Avista's existing ROW. Access roads and laydown or staging areas outside the ROW would be used temporarily during construction. Temporarily disturbed areas would be re-vegetated.

Avista must replace its existing transmission line to:

- Minimize potential future structure failures. The majority of the poles on this line are 10 to 30 years older than their expected life.
- Maintain the reliability of the local transmission system by increasing the conductor capacity and reducing thermal overloads.
- Reduce fire risks to Avista's existing electrical system and the environment.
- Meet transmission system public safety and reliability standards set by the National Electrical Safety Code and the North American Electric Reliability Corporation.

The work would not affect electric service to customers. Traffic on a few public roads would be temporarily increased during construction, but no public roads are expected to be closed during the project. Access to Avista's ROW would be on established roads and through some privately owned fields. The access through the privately owned fields would be coordinated with landowners prior to construction. The project would benefit all customers through increased system reliability and safety.

The project would impact the White Bluffs bladderpod, a plant listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The southern end of the project is located in the vicinity of, but outside of, the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. The old Hanford High School and Hanford Construction Camp Historic District are approximately 400 feet (122 meters) away from the existing transmission line. Potential impacts to this and other cultural resources are being assessed.

Because the project is located on Avista's ROW through federal land, DOE's action would be to issue a realty instrument to provide a temporary land use agreement for Avista to construct temporary access roads to portions of the transmission line and for temporary material staging and laydown. This federal action requires compliance with the NEPA, the National Historic Preservation Act, ESA and other laws and regulations. The EA will evaluate the No Action Alternative and Proposed Project's potential impacts on several resources including, but not limited to, cultural resources, wetlands and wildlife, as well as threatened and endangered species. DOE and Avista are coordinating with USFWS, other agencies, and interested area tribes to identify and evaluate resource impacts and to identify mitigation measures.

How to Comment

(1) *Provide your comments during the 14-day public scoping period January 3, 2017, through January 16, 2017.*

Please send written comments to: avistatranlineea@rl.gov
-OR-
Randall Krekel, NEPA Document Manager
U.S. Department of Energy
Richland Operations Office
P.O. Box 550, MSIN: A2-15
Richland, WA 99352

(2) *Participate in the public review of the draft EA when it is made available.*

Process and Schedule

The EA process is as follows:

Draft EA Public Scoping	1/3/2017 through 1/16/2017
Draft EA available for public comment	Summer 2017
Final EA and Finding of No Significant Impact (if warranted)	Late Summer/Fall 2017
If decision to rebuild, construction begins	Fall 2017

Figure 2. Existing Structures

Figure 3. Example of Proposed Structures